

In the dark we'll lay, in your arms I'll stay by TheMikeWheelers (jasongracefully)

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Summary:

New parents Mike and El are taking parenting one step at a time.

In the dark we'll lay, in your arms I'll stay

Mike creaked open the door to the nursery, looking for the familiar mess of curls that had been missing from beside him when he woke up. It must've been some time past 3AM, but ever since their daughter, Lily, had been born, Mike and El's sleep schedules had been gradually becoming more and more irregular.

When El's side of the bed was empty, Mike knew exactly where she must be. Neither of them had been sleeping all that well lately, taking care of a three-month-old baby made sure of that, but at least Mike had been getting as much rest as he could in the breaks between changing and feeding and bathing her. El, on the other hand, hadn't even been trying to sleep. More and more nights Mike had found her curled up with her back against Lily's crib, fighting exhaustion while wanting to stay awake in case her daughter needed her.

It made Mike's heart swell to see. When El had found out she was pregnant a year ago, it didn't take long for the insecurity to drip in. She had so little experience with babies, and she certainly had no idea how to be a mom. Mike spent all those months reassuring her that she'd be amazing at it, and since Lily was born El just proved that, becoming the most dedicated, loving mother around, even when that selflessness had started to hurt her. Mike was worried about his wife. The amount of sleepless nights had been piling up. She'd been wearing herself thin in the effort to make sure Lily was always safe.

El turned around when she heard the nursery door creak. She was cradling her baby in her arms, rocking her back and forth by the window.

"Shhh," She quieted Mike, and he stopped dead in his tracks, not wanting to move another inch or make any noise, "I just got her to sleep."

Mike couldn't pretend to ignore the growing bags under her eyes. Darkness from outside came creeping through the windows, making the normally bright and lively room feel a lot more somber. The yellow walls were dimmed, the only light coming from the lamp on the dresser.

Mike stepped towards his wife, wrapping his arms around her from behind. He buried his nose into her curls, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. Quiet moments like this were becoming increasingly rare, rather being replaced with the constant sounds of a screaming baby, so the peaceful moments were much appreciated. El leaned her head back against Mike. Her eyes shut as her body relaxed after all the stress of the day.

“She can sleep in her crib, you know. You don't have to stay up yourself to hold her.” Mike leaned away to gesture towards the empty crib across the room, and El struggled to open her eyes as the weights on her eyelids kept pressing down.

“I don't like to leave her,” El whispered back, her voice hushed as not to wake the sleeping child, “You know that.”

Mike did know that. It all came back to one of those fateful nights back before Lily was born. El was about 6 months pregnant at the time, and the realization that in just a few months they would really be parents was starting to sink in. Overwhelmed with nerves, Mike and El found themselves most nights curled up beneath their blankets, venting out their fears to one another in the dark, reassuring the other everything would be fine while simultaneously wondering how they'd ever handle this themselves.

It was on one of those nights they were up late together talking that El came clean about one of her biggest fears about the baby, if they would have her powers, and if they did, how could El protect them. She didn't want to end up like her own mother, her child taken from her and being sent into endless despair for years searching for them, but she had no idea how to prevent that. If somehow the bad men found out she was pregnant, even if El herself wasn't in danger of them coming after her anymore, what if they wanted her child?

Even after Lily was born, those fears remained. She was three months old now, and hadn't yet shown any sign of harboring the same abilities as her mother, and there hadn't been any government workers come to take her away, but El couldn't seem to let her fear go. Mike had told her she was just being protective, those were her mom-instincts kicking in to take care of their daughter, but even if that was the case, El couldn't help the way anxiety flooded

throughout her body whenever she was away from Lily. She was scared she would turn her back one day, and then when she turned around, woosh, Lily would be gone, taken to some new lab to be prodded and examined while El was stuck searching for a daughter she'd never find.

She knew her fears were illogical, and they manifested themselves in ridiculous ways, but that knowledge didn't ease them. She knew she shouldn't have any reason to worry, she should be able to go sleep in her own bed for a night while Lily slept alone in her room, but whenever she tried that, the nightmares that came with it weren't worth the rest.

"I wanna apologize to my dad." She leaned her head further back so it was resting on Mike's shoulder behind her.

"Hm?"

"For being so mad at him for protecting me when we were kids. For keeping me in the cabin. I get it now." El lifted her head so she could look down at Lily, "I don't understand how he was as calm as he was. I'd be going out of my mind if that was Lily and I in that situation. Doing everything I could to make sure she's safe, even if it drove her crazy."

El had enough fears about someday having to go into hiding with her family to protect Lily, like she had to go into hiding back when she was a kid. The thought terrified her, and as aggravating as it had been when she was younger, she never before realized just how nerve-wracking it all must have been for Hopper. She'd always known he did it to protect her, but now that she had a daughter of her own to protect and could see it from a parent's perspective, it really began to make sense.

Mike lifted his arms, still wrapped around El, to grab onto one of El's hands and one of Lily's. Lily squeezed onto his finger in her sleep, and he couldn't help but break into a doofy grin, the two girls he loved most in the world holding onto him. "We can go visit Hop soon, if you want."

Mike didn't admit it, but he missed Hopper himself. The two weren't

always so close, but when Mike's relationship with El had become more serious when they were teenagers and he started spending so much time with her and Hopper, they began to bond. They had almost nothing in common besides the fact that they both cared for Eleven, but Hop was quick to induct him into the family. Especially when things got bad at home with his parents, it was nice having someone like Hop to rely on. Not to mention, Hopper was great with Lily. He spoiled his granddaughter like a queen and was always looking forward to seeing her.

El smiled and nodded her head. Her and Mike had been living in their small apartment in Indianapolis for years now, and though it was only an hour drive from Hawkins, El missed everybody back home. They tried to visit as much as they could, but bringing Lily made that a bit more complicated, so their visits had decreased the last few months.

"El?"

"Mhm?"

"You need to sleep."

El turned around to argue with him that she was fine and she wasn't even tired, that she's used to not getting enough sleep and it doesn't matter. But when she turned to face her husband and looked into his annoyingly omniscient eyes she knew there was no use. He could read her like a book; she couldn't lie to him even if she wanted to.

Those damn eyes she loved so much, staring down at her, knowing exactly what she was thinking. "I just wanna stay here with Lily" El tried to argue, but Mike ignored her.

"Lily doesn't need you hovering over her all the time. What she needs is a mom who's happy and healthy and not sleep-deprived that can take care of her. You're not helping her by wearing yourself thin, you're just hurting the both of you."

El knew he was right, and she hated that. She knew there was no use in trying to debunk that, but it didn't change the fact that when she looked down at her little girl in her arms, she couldn't imagine

leaving her.

“Look at her.” El rocked the baby in her arms, her thumb rubbing back and forth across Lily’s arm, “She’s so little and innocent. No one’s ever hurt her yet. I don’t want her first time getting hurt to be because I left her alone and couldn’t protect her.”

“Hey, hey, hey.” Mike stopped her, grabbing onto her shoulders and pulling her closer to him, “That’s not gonna happen. She’s safe, and nothing’s ever gonna hurt her while she’s got the two of us just down the hallway.”

He wrapped her in a loose hug with Lily between them before kissing her forehead and continuing, “She’s gonna be a fighter, okay? Just like her mom. And until then, she’s got us to fight for her. But we can’t take care of her if we’re so tired we can’t even take care of ourselves.”

El nodded her head, closing her eyes and finally allowing herself to feel all the exhaustion she’d been trying to push away lately. Her whole body felt like lead, a headache was pounding against her forehead. If she hadn’t been holding Lily then, she was sure she would have collapsed onto Mike right there and had him carry her back to their room.

Mike seemed to sense this, and scooped Lily from her arms, “Go to bed, alright? I’ll sit with Lily for a few minutes, if she wakes up I’ll read her a story or something and put her back to sleep.”

El was too tired to form a response, nodding her head slightly before sluggishly dragging herself out of the room. She could barely even open her eyes, making the trip from the nursery to her bedroom by memory instead of relying on her sight to guide her.

Mike set Lily down in her crib, and watched her in awe for a minutes, wondering how he became so lucky for something to have gone so right in his life to bring him to this moment, with the best family he ever could wish for.

And when he made it back his bedroom 10 minutes later, he was glad to find his wife passed out under a hoard of blankets. Smiling, he laid

down next to her and pulled her closer to him. If she was going to steal all the blankets, then he would steal her body heat after all. She grumbled in her sleep slightly, but then buried her face deep into his chest.

For once, everybody in the apartment was asleep. Everybody was peaceful, everybody was silent.